

Turning points between stepparents and stepchildren

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Abstract

Remarriages are rising steadily in Singapore. There is a need to better understand the remarried families. This study is concerned with the understanding of turning point experiences of stepchildren in the relational development with their stepparents. This study moves away from traditional staged-based models to process-oriented models in looking at the stepparent-stepchild relationship. Drawing on the life course perspective and concepts of turning points and trajectories, a model for studying the processes of the stepparent-stepchild relationship is proposed and its application is demonstrated. Retrospective interviews were conducted on 12 stepchildren between the ages of 20 and 25 years old to elicit turning points in their relational histories. This study seeks to understand the primary types of events that are perceived as turning points in the stepparent-stepchild relationship and how these are related to changes in relational closeness. This study also seeks to uncover the most significant turning points and the nature of trajectories of the relationships. Findings revealed 9 primary types of turning points and 4 basic trajectories of relational development. The more commonly reported turning points were “argument(s) between respondents and stepparents”, “small acts of love” and “family disruptions”. Stepchildren also reported “argument(s) between respondents and stepparents” to be the most significant turning point in their relationships. The effects of these turning points on the relational closeness between the stepparent-stepchild relationship are explored. Finally, implications for social work and areas for future research are also discussed.

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